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ACADEMIC PAPER

Towards an understanding of integration amongst hospitality and tourism students using Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

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Abstract

By many measures, the higher education classroom is becoming more culturally diverse and recent years have seen a steady increase in the number of international students studying at UK universities. Using Bennett's (1986, 1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), this study aimed to measure the extent to which both home and international students are interculturally sensitive towards each others' needs in a post-92 British University. Using a cohort of undergraduate hospitality and tourism management students, the research identified emerging problems and benefits associated with cultural differences, with international students progressing toward the ethnorelative stages of Bennett's (1993) model and UK students retaining ethnocentric attitudes.

Keywords: intercultural sensitivity; integration; students

Introduction

Taking into account the requirement for effective intercultural encounters, this paper reports the findings of a study which was designed to measure the extent to which both home and international students enrolled on hospitality and tourism programmes are interculturally sensitive towards each others' needs in a post-92 British University. The study was primarily informed from Bennett's (1986, 1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), as a means of discussing the notion of difference and indicating the attitude of such students. This study was undertaken in order to demystify the causes that may prevent or facilitate integration into a desired cultural/social group, and consequently instigated discourse that aims to tackle integration issues and problems. Results from this study should help educators who are working in an increasingly diverse environment encourage the integration of various student groups more effectively.

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Over the past few decades, the concept of intensified transnational mobility has been extensively discussed in British higher education (HE). Although discussions initially focused on the Erasmus and Socrates projects (Wikipedia, 2010a, 2010b), which gave undergraduate students the opportunity to spend their third year of academic study in a host university either within or outside the European Union, lately they have extended to refer to the increasing number of international students who perceive English speaking environments as potential places of learning (Crawshaw, 2006; Risager, 2006). This increasing internationalisation has been encouraged by a combination of government initiatives, recent development of the HE sector and the changes in funding of HE in the UK, all resulting in a greater focus on attracting overseas students as a means of increasing revenue (Lengeek & Platenkamp, 2004). The interest in overseas students has resulted in a steady increase of international students and in 2007/2008 the total number of non-UK and non-EU students studying in the UK was 341,790, an increase of 5% on the previous year (HESA, 2009). This has encouraged universities to become internationalised communities by providing hospitality courses to both home and international students. One aim of increasing internationalisation of UK HE is to enable all students to share and receive intellectual resources and insights that can lead to greater intercultural understanding (Bates, 2005; Bennett, 2000; Deardorff, 2006; Lunn, 2008; Phipps & Barnett, 2007).

While cultural awareness and intercultural communication are inevitable requirements for harmonious everyday encounters, both inside and outside educational settings, research has mainly focused on the perceptions of international students towards their host populations (Ayano, 2006; Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; Brown, 2007; Burnett & Gardner, 2006; Campbell & Mingsheng, 2008; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Olsen, 2008; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2007; Simpson & Weihua, 2009; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). This has left the attitudes of home students relatively unexplored in that no or limited references have been made to the intercultural experiences both populations can create and maintain through the sharing of meanings and behavioural practices within the de-territorialised university community. Following this argument, implications can be made for multicultural communities which enable different groups to co-exist without necessarily appreciating each other; instead of intercultural spaces which aim to eliminate the notional distinction of "we" versus "they" by emphasising the need to learn to live together (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1999; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Shohamy, 2006; Starkey, 2007).

Demand for overseas education

The popularity of western education has been influenced by both demand and supply factors. From a demand perspective, Yang, Noels and Saumure (2006) considered that international students covet western education as a pathway to a good job with higher levels of pay, consequently resulting in a better life. While the UK attracts students from a number of countries, many originate from emerging nations such as China and are consequently the focus of a variety of studies. For example, it has been suggested that Chinese hospitality and tourism students who decide to study abroad question the quality of HE in China, suggesting a requirement to study overseas in order to guarantee a quality tertiary education experience (Zhao, 1991). Discussing Asia in general, Adams and Chapman (1998) emphasised the quality aspect and suggest that tertiary education has to cope with "weak physical facilities and severe limitations of faculty and staff" (p. 599). In addition, Du (2003) highlighted that tourism education is a relatively immature discipline that is starting to benefit from an improved education structure, better geographical coverage, and more relevant and appropriate curricula. However, Du (2003) also highlighted a range of continuing problems and issues. These included a continued lack of quality and poor economies of scale as a result of rapid expansion; a lack of clear educational objectives; a continued lack of basic resources such as relevant textbooks and other reference material; a lack of qualified and experienced faculty members who have qualifications and experience in the tourism field; a lack of government financial and other support; and little or no tourism academic research. While there is undoubtedly a great opportunity for a country such as China to provide a large number of HE places to its students, the issues highlighted above will continue to encourage students to seek HE abroad.

From a supply perspective, Diaz and Krauss (1996) argued that the demand for HE places in many Asian countries far exceeds supply. Therefore, many local students cannot study in their country due to lack of HE places and are forced to study overseas. For example, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University regularly receives a level of qualified applications for limited places on their Bachelor of Hotel and Tourism Management (Chon, 2001) that far exceeds those seen in contemporary universities in Australia, Britain or the USA. This, in part, reflects levels of existing supply in respective universities but also the impact of changing demographics on demand within home populations.

The above argument, which focuses on practical issues that give rise to international students pursuing studies overseas, is further underpinned by the perception that a degree from a western university is somehow more valuable and carries more status than a similar qualification from the students' home country (Yang et al., 2006). Indeed Altbach and Selvaratnam (1989) argued that Asian students consider overseas education as being important and of higher status than comparable education in their home country and Knight and De Wit (1997) stated that "students from most Asian countries look to the west as the gold standard for HE" (p. 22). The perceived difference in quality of education is echoed by academic staff in China with Chinese scholars ranking western universities above their own institutions (Yee, 1989). Therefore it might be suggested that the consequent combination of perceived higher quality of western education; limited facilities and resources in Asian institutions; inappropriate staff conducting little or no tourism research; the supply of tertiary education places; and demand by students; will result in many Asian students undertaking tertiary studies in one of the major English speaking destination countries.

The above discussion is further contextualised by a recent study undertaken by Kim, Guo, Wang and Agrusa (2007), which examined Asian students' motivations to study hospitality and tourism management overseas. While the authors admit to there being a significant sampling limitation to their study, it is worthwhile noting that they found that selected students from China, Korea and Taiwan were motivated to study overseas due to a combination of an attraction to the country of study; a perceived improvement in career opportunities once the study period had been successfully completed; a sense of academic achievement; and, interestingly, an impression that their study period would be easy.

A number of studies have examined international students studying overseas. However, these have tended to focus on academic issues that international students face. For example, a number of studies have suggested that international students studying in western universities adopt a learning style preference that is at odds with their domestic peers (Barron, 2002, 2004; Barron & Arcodia, 2002) and, in addition, experience a range of learning problems and issues that affect their overall educational experience (Barron, 2004). Indeed Pedersen (1991) considered that, in order to succeed, such students are expected to adjust to a narrowly defined set of classroom behaviours. There is also evidence of a failure among faculty and institutions in western universities to fully understand the learning needs of international students (Biggs, 1996).

In addition, there is a body of research that examines contemporary classroom dynamics and there is much evidence (Barron, 2004; Burns, 1991; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002; Turner, 2006; Volet & Ang, 1998) to suggest that local students and international students do not readily mix, and tend to study in parallel throughout their programme. Volet and Ang (1998) found that both domestic and international students preferred working on assignments with culturally similar students. Ledwith and Seymour (1999) concluded that international students in the UK were either ignored or excluded from group activities by their domestic peers. Russell (2005) found that international students on a hospitality and tourism programme considered UK students to be "cold, uncaring, unfriendly, rude and closed to different cultures" (p. 71).

Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS)

Interculturalists have been interested in scales that might be used to measure intercultural sensitivity for research purposes, as well as in intercultural education, training, and personnel selection. A number of instruments exist, two of the best known and most widely used being the Culture Shock Inventory (Reddin, 1994) and the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (Kelley & Meyers, 1992). While both measure specific human characteristics thought to be associated with intercultural sensitivity (e.g., flexibility and openness, emotional resilience, cultural knowledge), neither purports to measure intercultural sensitivity as a developmental construct.

The DMIS (Figure 1), originally published in 1986, and updated in 1993, was designed to assess intercultural sensitivity as a developmental construct and, as such, has been used by researchers interested in understanding the various developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity. It was developed by Milton Bennett in response to the concept of difference, as created and maintained through the perceptual process of human experience. Human experience suggests that individuals enter the social world with habitual system of meanings which constitute implicit cultural values, norms, beliefs and hidden assumptions. This system of meanings is activated when individuals encounter inexplicable phenomena which they seek to interpret on the basis of pre-existing knowledge.

Ethnocentric stages			Ethnorelative stages		
Denial	Defence	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration

Figure 1: The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS)

During the process of interpretation, inexplicable phenomena are fitted into pre-established absolute categories which represent the normal sense of perceptual reality. "Normality" reinforces the centrality of the interpreters' identities without upsetting their perceived system of internal values. This condition constitutes the ethnocentric stages (denial of difference, defence against difference, and minimisation of difference) of the DMIS as internal values become fixated and are seldom challenged on the basis of the dialogic process of sense-experience.

However, according to Bennett (1986, 1993), individuals have the opportunity to progress towards the ethnorelative stages (acceptance of difference, adaptation to difference, and integration of difference) of the DMIS. This is achieved by continuous contact with significant others (cf. Mead, 1934) who demonstrate differences as equally valid alternatives to pre-existing perceptual reality.

During the ethnorelative stages of the model, the "self" is decentred in that individuals no longer employ their own value judgments as the very criteria of truth and efficiency (Ford & Dillard, 1996). Rather, they relativise their own opinions by shifting their frames of reference to larger representations of reality (Monceri, 2009). These representations of reality provide for the creation and maintenance of new perceptual categories according to which meanings are construed. In this sense, the individual interpreter not only considers the underlying values and norms which are shared among members of specific host communities but also focuses on the level of individual behaviour without assuming that the latter is neither inherently inferior to the practices of the interpreter nor to the standards set by the host community (Guilherme, 2004). This allows individuals to empathise with the "other" by constructing an ever-expanding platform of shared knowledge where intercultural sensitivity is exercised.

Sub-stages of the DMIS

Completion of the DMIS allows the researcher to identify the stage at which the respondent finds themselves with regard to their level of intercultural sensitivity. The various stages identified by the DMIS are detailed below:

1. Denial is usually experienced when individuals reside in isolated communities and thus have limited or no contact with other cultures and civilizations (Bennett, 1986).
2. Defence is a situation where individuals perceive differences as threatening as they do not comply with the unwritten rules of conduct, norms, perceptions and intentions thought to be shared by their own cultural category (Faris, 1953; Levine, Morald & Choi, 2003).
3. Minimisation suggests that individuals disregard and/or trivialise differences by burying them under the "weight of cultural similarities" (Bennett, 1986, p. 183).
4. Acceptance constitutes the first sub-stage of ethnorelativism where differences are respected in that they represent equally valid worldviews (Bennett, 1986).
5. Adaptation constitutes the heart of intercultural communication in that it presupposes that subjects have developed the ability to view reality through the eyes of others (Bennett, 1986, 1993).
6. Integration indicates that individuals are able to become "a part of and apart from a given cultural context" (Bennett, 1986, p. 186).

Research aim

Using the DMIS, this study aimed to measure the extent to which both home and international students are interculturally sensitive towards each others' needs in a post-92 British University. Using a cohort of hospitality and tourism undergraduate students, this research was undertaken as a means of demystifying the causes that may prevent or facilitate integration into a desired cultural/social group, and consequently instigates discourse that aims to tackle integration issues and problems.

Methods

The sample and setting for this study were all students within the School of Marketing, Tourism and Languages at Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland. This university was chosen as it represents a typical example of a "new" or "Post '92" university in the UK that provides a range of programmes that appear attractive to home, EU and international students. The chosen university has been, and continues to be, very active in the international student market and consequently the student body is very diverse. This diversity is evident when the student mix is analysed. For example, in 2007 the student body numbered almost 14,000: 6,400 home students, 4,800 EU students and 2,800 overseas students (Napier University, 2007).

Based on a detailed literature review, detailed above, and the DMIS, a questionnaire was developed to investigate the educational experiences of both international and home students enrolled on hospitality and tourism programmes by focusing on the extent to which both sets of participants are interculturally sensitive to each others' needs. The questionnaire comprised three sections: the first section determined demographics; the second section invited respondents to consider the advantages and disadvantages of studying in multicultural classrooms; and the third section focused on Bennett's (1986, 1993) DMIS questions, which examined how respondents approached dealing with cultural differences. The majority of questions required a prompted response but each question presented respondents with the opportunity to provide qualitative comments as a means of elaboration.

The questionnaire was administered to all students enrolled on programmes in the School of Marketing, Tourism and Languages during the early part of semester 2, February 2009. In order to achieve a maximum response, and to answer questions students may have had during the completion of the questionnaire, it was administered in the controlled environment of formal class time during the student's orientation and under the supervision of the

researcher. Ticehurst and Veal (1999) described this approach to a questionnaire survey as a “captive group survey” (p. 138) and suggested that this method of questionnaire administration is expeditious and less problematic than in less controlled situations. The controlled nature of the questionnaire administration resulted in a total of 121 useable questionnaires being completed. The sample population comprised a majority of students (86%) under 24 years, single (93%), female (70%) and domestic, with 65% of respondents identifying themselves as either Scottish or British.

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analysed via SPSS, and a range of frequencies and cross tabulations were developed. The non-prompted, qualitative questions relating to how respondents approached dealing with cultural differences were manifest and latent coded, and again a range of frequency tables and cross tabulations were generated, which subsequently allowed for the development of bar charts. These charts are presented in the next section, along with a selection of appropriate qualitative responses made by students.

Results and discussion

The first question asked respondents to consider their understanding of cultural differences in the learning environment. Although some students appeared to believe that exposure to differences could encourage them to become more open-minded and appreciative towards other cultures, this study found that a majority (69%) of respondents considered that cultural differences discourage international students from mixing with their home counterparts. Typical qualitative comments to this question focused on classroom behaviour, with a level one UK student stating that “international students are sometimes too shy to ask again if they haven’t understood something”. Similarly, another level one UK student felt that “international students tend to keep quiet in class and not get involved in any discussions”. A level two UK student raised the issue of protecting a comfortable environment and stated that “students tend to prefer to stick with their own kind which presents problems with group work”.

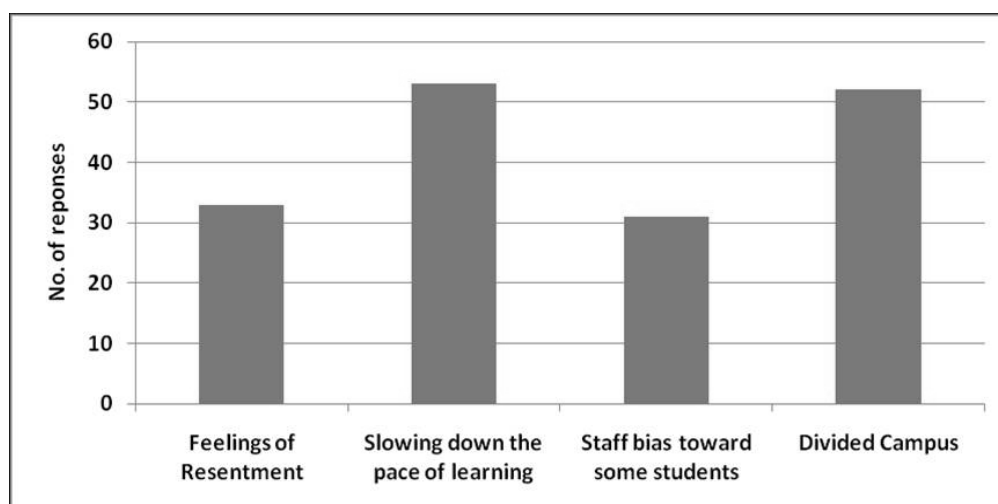


Figure 2: Emerging problems as a consequence of cultural differences

The concept of cultural difference in the classroom was further explored, and all respondents were asked to consider specific issues and problems emerging from cultural differences. Figure 2 provides an overview of their responses. Cross tabulation analysis based on nationality demonstrated that 43% of respondents believed that cultural differences were responsible for a divided campus: 35% of the cohort were from the UK, the remaining 65% from overseas. Despite the fact that campus division does not necessarily show a lack of empathy between the respondents, further analysis indicates a rather grim scenario for the university classroom. It was found that all respondents who suggested that they had feelings of resentment responses, and all respondents considering that staff were biased towards some students, came from UK participants. In addition, of the 54 responses indicating that cultural differences resulted in the pace of learning being slowed, some 89% came from UK

students. Given that the sample comprised a majority (65%) of UK students, the results of this cross tabulation would suggest that there appears to be a division of feelings based on nationality, with a significant proportion of UK students displaying feelings of resentment towards overseas students sharing their classroom.

From the emerging evidence, it can be inferred that UK respondents are likely to develop ethnocentric attitudes towards overseas students, created and maintained through defensive strategies. While this may ensure the normal delivery of educational provision for them, it can also establish a boundary which, in this case, could be demonstrated by a divided campus. As discussed earlier, this condition can generate negative stereotypes and unjustifiable beliefs on the basis of national origin, which may be used to distinguish the “in-group” from the “out-group” (Bennett, 1993). As intercultural theorists argue, separation can then disallow both parties from transferring cultural property and symbolic values to each other in the process of becoming sensitive intercultural beings (Levine, Morald, & Choi, 2003).

However, some students' inclination to perceive differences as beneficial outcomes of the culture learning process demonstrates their acceptance of cultural differences. Figure 3 summarises the advantages or benefits of sharing the educational experience. It can be seen that a majority of respondents suggested that a range of cultures in the classroom provided an opportunity to learn about those cultures, make friends, and interact and share experiences. A significant number indicated that the inclusion of different cultures encouraged them to question their own viewpoints and cultural bias, and others identified cross-cultural interaction as a means of developing contacts for future careers.

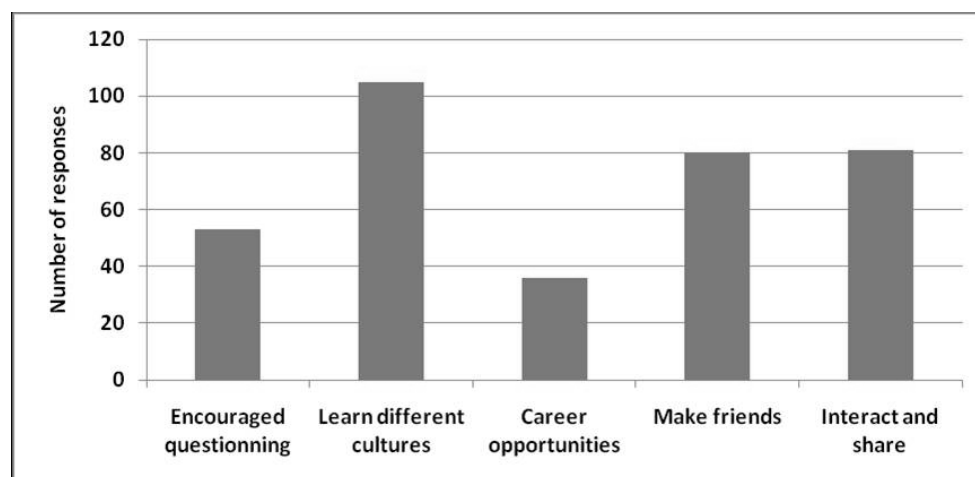


Figure 3: Emerging benefits as a consequence of cultural differences

From the preceding results, it may be contended that some participants have the opportunity to progress towards the adaptation sub-stage of the DMIS, as they appear to believe that differences allow for culture learning by means of interaction and sharing. This view seems to be in keeping with Ford and Dillard's (1996) dialogic exchange which demonstrates that familiarisation can enable individuals to empathise with each other by understanding the underlying values that may guide their own and others' behaviours. Although this condition may imply that respondents are likely to proceed towards adaptation by considering beliefs, attitudes and norms through the eyes of others, it does not necessarily show that all participants in this study will be able to reach this sub-stage. This can be inferred with reference to the relatively smaller number of respondents who appeared to claim that familiarisation would encourage them to question their own identities compared to those who seemed to be inclined towards the learning different cultures standpoint. As a consequence, the perceived lack of questioning of one's own identity may not only hinder the progression to adaptation and integration but may also drive students back to ethnocentrism.

Nevertheless, respondents' willingness to address differences, as shown by Figure 4, demonstrates a more optimistic forecast for the intercultural landscape of the classroom. For this question, respondents had the opportunity to indicate whether they would ignore cultural

differences by concentrating on cultural similarities; address differences by demonstrating willingness to solve any problems emerging from them; or do neither by perhaps maintaining a strong ethnocentric attitude towards their significant others. It can be seen from Figure 4 that the majority of respondents in this sample were willing to recognise cultural differences by possibly attempting to identify ways to solve cultural misunderstandings. However, a significant minority of participants demonstrated that they would ignore any differences by perhaps burying them under the weight of cultural similarities. In addition, a number of respondents stated that they would do neither, perhaps suggesting that they were satisfied engaging exclusively with members of their own in-group. Importantly, all overseas students who took part in this study indicated that they would address differences, whilst only 24% of UK students responded similarly. Consequently, all responses that demonstrated an ignorance of differences and all responses stating that no action would be taken came from UK students.

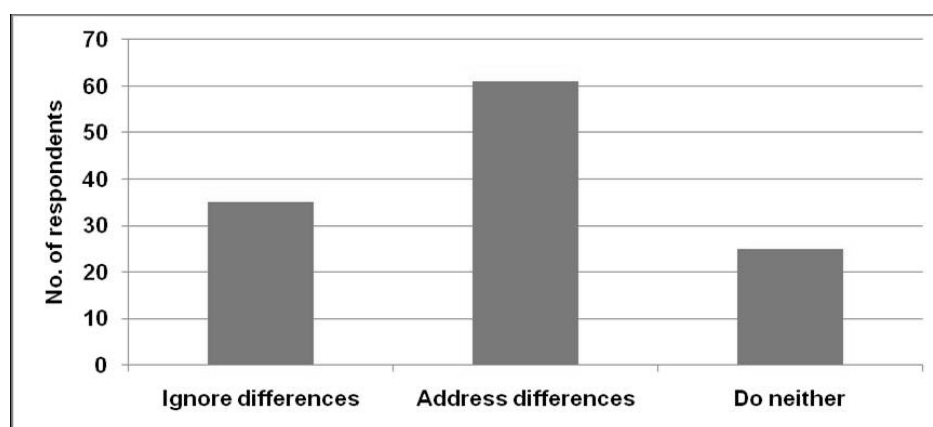


Figure 4: Students' reactions to dealing with cultural differences in the classroom

Considering the preceding findings, it appears that EU and international students are likely to progress towards the ethnorelative stages of the DMIS as they show willingness to recognise cultural differences and address any problems stemming from them. As Monceri (2009) would argue, these students may be demonstrating a flexible self, emerging from comparison processes with representatives of both their in-group and out-group categories. Recognition and acceptance of these differences may suggest a progression towards adaptation where participants will develop an ability to view reality through the eyes of others. However, this can be possible only when participants begin sharing their experiences with others through the dialogic process (Ford & Dillard, 1996). In contrast with overseas students, UK respondents appear to be minimising differences by focusing on cultural similarities. This condition may prevent these UK students from developing intercultural sensitivity since they do not seem to be acting as intercultural subjects by taking critical advantage of the different intercultural narratives available (Guilherme, 2004: 297). In addition, some other UK students appear to be indicating a degree of ultimate ethnocentrism as they may prefer to exclusively associate with perceived prototypical representatives of their in-group category.

Taking into account that some students would prefer to address differences, the following question asked participants to state any possible steps they would take to achieve this. Respondents were presented with a range of responses from which they could choose as many they felt applicable to their situation. Figure 5 presents an overview of the responses. The majority of respondents felt that they would not only respect the cultural differences of others, but also attempt to balance their own norms as a means of self-awareness and development, thus making an attempt to recognise and adapt to both their own needs and those of others. Equally positive was the assertion that some respondents would be willing to temporarily modify their behaviour in order to more effectively communicate with students from different cultures.

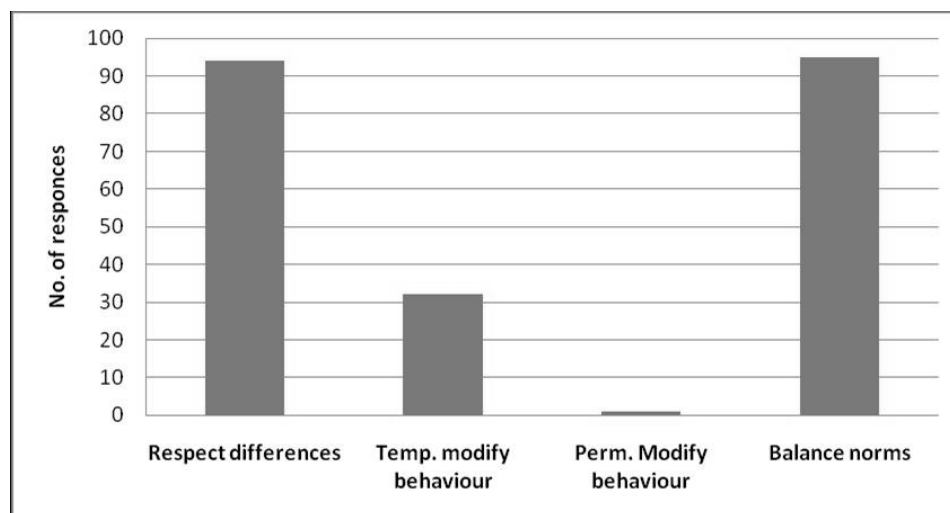


Figure 5: Dealing with cultural differences in the classroom

From the preceding evidence, it seems that a large number of participants were willing to transform the university classroom into a community of shared practice or a cultural platform (Guilherme, 2004) of shared knowledge where UK and overseas students could study harmoniously together. According to Bennett (1986, 1993), this attitude is perceived at the ethnorelative stages of the DMIS, in particular where instances of adaptation are noticed. In this case, respondents demonstrated willingness towards adaptation by respecting differences and balancing norms. This behaviour suggests an empathic shift from one frame of reference to another, which intercultural theorists recognise as an act of tolerance that is likely to enable the mutual transfer of cultural property and symbolic values (Monceri, 2009). Although this behaviour may indicate openness towards “otherness”, it does not necessarily mean that the participants will be able to effectively become a part of the community of shared practice they have constructed in order to flexibly join another cultural platform. This is mostly evident from the relatively small number of students who maintained that they would temporarily modify their behaviour in view of cultural differences in the making of an integration posture. This suggests that communities of shared practice are in danger of becoming static and monolithic constructs which, although providing a shelter of security, only allow minimal opportunities for elaboration.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to measure the extent to which both home and overseas students studying in a post-92 UK university are interculturally sensitive to each others' needs. The study was primarily informed by Bennett's (1986, 1993) DMIS and, where relevant, drew on cultural and intercultural theory from the discipline of social psychology to explain any causes which may prevent or facilitate integration into a desired social/cultural group. On the basis of a questionnaire which was distributed to a particular group of tourism and hospitality management students, two major findings emerging from this study.

First, it was found that some students are likely to progress towards the ethnorelative stages of the model. This became most evident when respondents were required to consider any benefits stemming from cultural differences, as well as point out any possible ways they would follow in order to address perceived differences. Findings indicated that participants demonstrated an overall acceptance and possible adaptation to these differences, which was paradigmatically exemplified through responses related to respect and balancing of cultural norms. Although this condition can enable the creation and maintenance of a community of shared practice, it does not necessarily mean that participants are skilled enough to join another cultural platform in response to the social environment in which they may engage in the future. Under these circumstances, it may be inferred that respondents will be able to operate sensitively within the university community. However, it can be questioned whether they will maintain their intercultural sensitivity outside the dynamics of the protective space, given that no or limited instances of integration were found. However, a majority of those

students embedded in or progressing towards a state of ethnorelativism did not identify themselves as British or Scottish on their questionnaires, and it might be suggested that national origin will have an effect on an individual's level of cultural sensitivity: students originating from countries outside the UK are more likely to be accepting of cultural differences.

Although some students may progress towards ethnorelativism, the second major finding indicates that some others are likely to retain their ethnocentric attitudes towards their significant others. This was found when participants were asked to consider the problems emerging out of cultural differences and any actions they would undertake in order to tackle them. Cross-tabulation analysis on the basis of national origin demonstrated that while a large proportion of overseas students are appreciative towards their UK counterparts, the same cannot be claimed with regard to UK students. As such, a great number of UK students were found to develop defence mechanisms by either minimising differences or failing to address them. Despite the fact that this could have strengthened the ties between UK members of the in-group, it has also resulted in a divided campus. As a consequence, unless action is taken the university is likely to become a multicultural community which, although providing space for cohabitation, will not necessarily enable cohabitants to live harmoniously together.

Like all research, this study has a number of limitations which the authors attribute to the relative weakness of questionnaires to present valid, reliable and trustworthy empirical evidence. Consequently, it is fully recognised that the results of this research present a snapshot of feelings amongst a specific group of students at one university, at a particular point in time. Although the authors make no or limited claims regarding generalisability of the results, this study has discovered two major findings which denote the level of intercultural sensitivity amongst a given group of students. These should be of concern to any university whose strategy is to attract overseas students to study on their UK campus and initiative should be put in place to increase the level of intercultural sensitivity amongst UK students. It might be argued that only by developing such a change will the goal of a unified campus, populated by students who take critical advantage of cultural differences, be realised.

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